

Tips to Informal Caregivers
on Giving Personal Care

Caring for the Ambulatory Older Adult

An ambulatory person should be encouraged to do as much of his personal care as he can. Many people experience a real sense of accomplishment in being able to take a shower or bath. This also provides exercise and stimulates circulation. A tub or shower should be considered only if the person is strong enough and if it is included as part of the care plan approved by his/her doctor.

Special concerns in providing a safe bath:

- Prepare the water and room before the person enters the bathroom. Test the water on the inner wrist. The skin of the elderly person may not be sensitive to the water's temperature. Hot water dilates the blood vessels, decreases blood pressure, and thus increases the elderly person's risk of blacking out, becoming dizzy or confused.
- Assure that the room is warm and supplied with soap, washcloth and towel. A small rubber-tipped stool or chair should be placed in the tub. A rubber mat may also be placed in the bottom of the tub to decrease the risk of falling.

Procedure for transferring to the bathtub:

- Explain what the procedure will be.
- Place a straight chair or wheelchair facing the tub.
- Allow room for the person to fit his legs into the tub.
- Steady the chair. Lock the brakes if a wheelchair is used.
- Have the person lift or help him lift one foot at a time over the side of the tub.
- Have the person grip the side of the tub and slide carefully off the chair onto the edge of the tub. If he needs help, support his body around the waist from behind. (A sheet or strong belt may be placed around the waist for firm support.)

- Have the person move from the tub's edge onto a stool placed in the tub, giving help as needed. Or, help him lower himself carefully into the water as he holds onto the grab bar and tub edge.
- Wash and dry, providing help as needed.
- Drain the water out of the tub before the person stands up.
- Place chair facing the tub.
- To get out of the tub, have the person take hold of the grab bar, supporting him around the waist if needed. Help him to a sitting position on the edge of the tub.
- Help him to a standing position and follow the procedure for sitting in the chair as previously demonstrated.
- If the person is weak after his bath, he should return to bed rest. Complete grooming and other personal care, such as brushing teeth, can be done when he is feeling better that same day. Grooming aids can be brought to the bathroom. The bed may be made and the room cleaned while the person is sitting up or bathing. It is easier to make the bed while the person is not in it.

The above statements are not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease. You should always consult with your physician about any health and lifestyle concerns or issues you may have.